

Coach-Pitch & Machine-Pitch Coaches Manual

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Naperville Park District

Coach-Pitch & Machine Pitch Program Objectives

1. To develop proper sportsmanship and respect for opponents among all program participants.
2. To provide every participant with fun, equal participations, and physical exercise in a non-pressured, non-competitive atmosphere.
3. To instill an appreciation and knowledge of proper stretching and warm-up techniques.
4. To enhance a basic knowledge of the game of baseball; its rules, strategies and fundamentals.
5. To teach the proper throwing techniques, including grip, stride, target, and follow through.
6. To teach the proper execution of a catch, including handling of glove and techniques involved in fielding ground balls and fly balls.
7. To teach proper running techniques, including leaving the batters box, running the bases, and advancing from base-to-base in game situations.
8. To teach the proper fundamentals of hitting, including grip, stance, stride, swing, hand-eye coordination and follow through.

Introduction

Parents who involve their youngsters in coach-pitch or any team sport are providing them with a wonderful opportunity! It is an opportunity to develop spatial and perceptual skills which they cannot achieve in front of a television or with paper and pencil work.

Sports enable children to learn social rules such as fairness and sportsmanship; to value teamwork so that when their team wins, even though they missed hitting or fielding a ball, they can feel a sense of pride. Mainly, they are learning how to have lots of fun with children their own age and with adults who care enough to see that they enjoy themselves, feel a sense of positive self-esteem, and help to develop a sense of competency whether they win or lose.

You, as coaches are not only teachers, but role models. How you react to success or failure will be passed on to your team. Coaches that praise, “High Five” and instruct have successful and happy teams.

Be enthusiastic. If you relax and have fun it can be contagious! You as successful adults can pass on skills you’ve learned in your life. These children have only had five or six years of experience and this is probably their first experience on a team. They don’t even know if they want to be here. Mom signed them up! Good sportsmanship, fun and camaraderie should be emphasized.

Coaching children can be a very rewarding experience for both you and the children. Have a wonderful season and thank you for your help!

How Children Learn

Children use primarily three senses when learning to move their bodies in a specific way. The more senses you use the better your chances of the children understanding and remembering.

Sight – Demonstrate

Sound – Verbally explain in simple terms. Have the children repeat things out loud. Repetition is a wonderful way for children to learn!

Touch – Physically going through the motions. Practice.

Keep instruction simple and short. Repetition and continued encouragement is the key. **REMEMBER KEEP IT SIMPLE!**

About Practice:

Watch the children closely so that the correct movement patterns are being practiced and you're not just re-enforcing incorrect techniques. Too many repetitions can lead to an "I don't care" attitude.

Set Goals:

For the practices, and for the games. Set goals that the child can be successful at. **Example:** Game goal ... everyone to get on base sometime today. Game goal ... half of the team will score at home plate. Practice goal ... every child will hit 2 balls past the pitcher etc. Be positive. Be enthusiastic. Stress individual improvement and teamwork. Not winning!

Make Learning Fun!

Invent Game!

Play Against the Parents!

Children need help in mentally visualizing whatever you expect them to do. *Use lots of props when conducting practice.* The children will learn faster and they'll remember for a longer period of time. (Remember the chalkboard I brought to practice ... or ... remember when I used cookies to show you the positions on the field.)

Make Learning Fun!

Don't lecture.

Reward the positive.

Other Ideas

- Laundry bottles for accuracy.
- Hit the backstop on the fly from a designated spot. Move backwards and do it again. Power.
- Establish opening and closing routines.
- Over the line.
- Running bases or "pickle".
- Pepper drill and variations.

Game Night

- Arrive on the field early. Strongly encourage parents to arrive 15 minutes prior to the game so games can proceed on schedule. Games should start precisely at 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. Idea ... first on the field ... first to bat etc.
- Have coach's help to position the child on the field. This is very time consuming and takes the longest.
- Solicit base coaches if necessary.
- A dugout area is designated. Keep players in designated area. **Assign a dugout coach** – either a parent volunteer or a volunteer coach to keep children in control.
- Encourage a team yell for each batter. “Go Sara!” “Yea Drew!”
- Teach an opening “chant” ... “Good Luck Purple” etc. Make up a cheer. Have an opening and closing routine.
- Why not try bringing a small American flag and have parents and players sing the Star Spangled “Banner ... its like a real game.
- Try a “7th” inning stretch (midway third inning) and have everyone sing “Take Me Out to the Ball Game”. Children love routines like big leaguers!
- Make sure children line up and shake or slap hands with the opposing team. This promotes good sportsmanship and adds closure to the game.

Instructional Objectives

Instruction is effective to the degree that it succeeds in:

- changing students
- in desired directions
- and not in undesired directions

Specifically:

Set realistic goals for yourself and the children ... it helps them understand what is expected of them and what they will learn.

Example: By the end of the Coach-Pitch season I would like 100 percent of my team to be able to identify (through demonstration), half of the playing positions in the field by playing those positions during practices and the games.

Day 1 – Practice

Parent Meeting

- Introduce yourself and other coaches
- Briefly explain the program in general – fun, sportsmanship, camaraderie and learning basics of baseball are to be stressed
- Drop-off and pick-up procedures ... (kids cannot be on playground)
- Children must be picked up on time
- Practice and game times
- Distribute the Rules, Team Roster and Game Schedule
- Explain the rainout procedure – you will call if practice or game is cancelled. Do not call the park district.
- Set up a telephone tree ... (this will make your life easier)
- Parent sign-up sheet ... (you can assign treats for games and practices, that way each family brings something)
- Solicit volunteers ... practices, games, vacations, dugout coaches
- Distribute T-shirts and hats ... (tell them to mark them with their name, especially hats!)
- Pick a name for your team. It does not have to be a major league name. Make it fun. Last year a team with red shirts was called “the Red Hot Chili Peppers.” I’ve heard the names Orange Crush, Gray Sharks, Blue Snakes, Flames, the Great Grapes, The Jolly Jade Giants, Blue Fins and Purple Parrots to name a few. The kids love it!

Suggestions

While one coach is talking to the parents, the other coach can give the children nametags, talk about the game and explain that it’s an easy version of baseball. Ask about previous playing experience, if any. Basically, try to get to know the kids. Introduce them to each other. Explain teamwork ... everyone helping each other. (If you don’t have something nice to say ... don’t say it.) Only positive things can be said. **We are a team.** We cheer each other on! High-fives are encouraged.

Children lose interest and may cause problems if they are not actively involved. You need to divide into small groups for safety reasons. Eager players are very inclined to pick up a bat and swing it without the slightest concern of the danger involved.

Warm-ups

Try to do everything standing up. Some kids may be allergic to grass or the grass may be wet.

Stretching

1. Leg stretch from standing.
2. Sit on ground and grab end of toes. Hold 30 seconds. Do NOT bounce.
3. With left leg extended in front of you, bend right leg and place your right foot near your left knee. Stretch and touch your left toe with your right hand. Hold 30 seconds. Repeat and switch legs.

Stretching – Continued

4. Arm stretch – gently push right arm over to left shoulder, hold, change arms.
5. Underarm stretch. Bend your right arm, pointing your elbow toward the sky. Reach in back of your head with your left hand and pull the right elbow. Hold for 30 seconds.

Remember: Stretch – hold and count – do not bounce or jerk

Running Bases

Yelling out loud. Why first base is called first, etc. (Try putting objects on each base for easier recognition.)

The Field

Explain the positions. Ask for volunteers who may know where a certain position is located. This also lets you know who knows what. Be consistent in your use of terminology in the instruction of what you want them to do. Begin this reinforcement of terminology in practice, and carry it to the game with you.

Very often coaches tend to put more coordinated players in the infield and put the less capable in the outfield. There are at least three good reasons to rotate young players.

1. Health – a child is less likely to suffer stress from overuse to a specific body part.
2. Most children have trouble usually tracking fly balls and have less chance of success in the outfield and therefore, don't get a great deal of positive reinforcement.
3. It is a good idea to let young players test their skills at different positions. They've never played baseball and really don't have any idea which position they might like.

Balls

Playing catch. Explain basics.

Last Practice

Can be used as a rain-date makeup game. You can plan a game of parents versus children. Hand out certificates, trophies and/or special awards.

Practice Ideas

Plan your practices in advance. Change drills every few minutes so the children won't become easily bored and inattentive. This means, you'll have to plan ahead to conduct (4) four or (5) five different activities in your practice schedule. Don't give too many directions at once. Remember children have short attention spans. **If you give them more instruction than they can handle, they'll become confused, flustered and lose interest.** The most important element in teaching is *PRAISE* and *ENCOURAGEMENT*. Children have a fantastic amount of energy and will try again and again if they believe in themselves and receive encouragement.

Five Major Activities

1. *Playing catch*

- a) Playing catch with a teammate
- b) Playing catch with a coach
- c) Short distance
- d) Longer distance
- e) Ground balls
- f) Short fly balls

2. *Hitting a pitched ball*

- a) Hand-eye coordination
- b) Hitting at home plate
- c) Directional hitting
- d) Hitting and running

3. *Base running*

- a) Running off the bat
- b) Running drills to first base
- c) Drills to other bases from a stop
- d) Drills to other bases from batting
- e) The fly ball drill
- f) Stopping on the bag
- g) Listening for the base coach

4. *Fielding off the bat*

- a) Fielding ground balls
- b) Fly balls
- c) Fielding and throwing to first
- d) Throwing to the other bases
- e) Tagging the runner
- f) Practicing at different positions
- g) Drills related to the pitching circle
- h) Covering home
- i) Backing-up in the outfield

5. *Defensive fielding with base runners*

- a) Getting the out at first
- b) Getting the force-out at other bases
- c) Getting the out at home plate
- d) Outfield throws to the proper base
- e) Backing-up the outfield
- f) Bases loaded situations
- g) And many others

You may want to start your practices with “playing catch.” Kids seem to least like doing this activity. Batting practice is every child’s favorite. Keep your players busy at practice. Conducting Coach-Pitch practice is nothing like working with mature players. You can get them set up and turn to sneeze and they’ll be throwing their gloves at each other, running into bushes or laying down because they are tired. Have fielders shag balls during batting practice – hit grounders to them. I can’t emphasize enough the importance of having fully packed, busy practices. If any parents standing around at practice (not watching younger siblings) invite them to help. They will help keep the children productive and the parents will enjoy getting involved with you and they might even appreciate how thought your job really is!

Develop an opening and closing practice routine – whether it is a short talk, cheer or instructions. Do the same each week. Make sure you have some type of beverage at practice. Use your snack assignment sheet! Encourage each child to bring a water bottle to game and practice.

Do not leave any of the children at the park after practice. If their parents are late picking them up, stay with them. Call the Coach-Pitch coordinator if you have a consistent problem.

Coaching – How to Catch

Catching a ball hit into the air will probably be the most difficult thing for a coach to teach and the child to accomplish. The fundamentals of catching a ball in the air are rather simple. As to whether the ball is caught or not depends a lot upon the fielder’s visual judgment, agility, eye-hand coordination, overall coordination, speed, range and concentration. That certain ability to see a ball in flight and be able to judge where it’s going could be the key element of catching a ball, and it is the one element that can’t be taught.

Catching, like many other areas of a child’s ability is going to progress only through practice, experience, and maturation.

Success in accomplishing most of the physical fundamentals of catching a thrown or batted ball depends significantly on the player’s judgment, eye-hand coordination and lack of fear of the ball. Most infields you play on will be poorly kept-up and bad hops will be common.

Since the ball is lighter and softer than a regular baseball and since the batters never hit the ball too hard, the chance of a serious injury is minimal. However, some balls will be hit hard enough to stun or bruise a player, and you should be sympathetic and understanding. It is not the time yet to make tough he-men out of them.

The physical fundamentals of fielding a ground ball are somewhat different from that of catching a fly ball. Consequently, we will review the fundamentals of each separately and start with fielding ground balls.

Catching – How to Catch – Continued

1. Keep the body and glove low on ground balls. When coaching, try to exaggerate this position. Make sure the fielders bend their knees. Show them how to keep very low to the ground, even able to slap their glove right on top of the infield. Balls will much more frequently go under their gloves than over their gloves.

Most of the time a player will be waiting for a ground ball with his glove hand a foot or two above the ground anticipating to go down for it if it's necessary. He doesn't realize that the arms and hands can come up for a ball much quicker than they can go down for one.

2. The fielder's feet should establish a wide base (feet wide apart, but not off balance) from which to begin fielding a ground ball. The left foot should be a little forward of the right, with the right toe level with the left instep.
3. The arms should extend the glove and hand out away from the body so that the eye-hand contact can have its positive influence on telling the player exactly where the ball is in relationship to the glove. If a fielder cannot see his glove because it is too close to his body, then he may have a difficult time lining it up on the same plane as the ball. Have your fielders keep their gloves out in front of them so they can keep the glove and ball on the same plane.

The ball should be caught toward the glove side of the body.

4. For balls caught below the waist, the heel of the glove should be up with the fingers pointing down.

When the ball bounces above the waist, the glove should be turned around with the fingers pointing up and the heel down.

5. The eyes should try to see the ball as soon as it becomes visible whether right off the end of the bat, or just out of the hand of the thrower. The greater the concentration of the fielder on the whereabouts of the ball, the better his chances of seeing it, figuring out where it is going and feeling comfortable about the ball climbing at him.
6. The fielder's eyes should watch the ball travel all the way into his glove. It may be years later (and maybe never) before the blur of a close ball can really be seen clearly by him.
7. The glove hand and throwing hand should work together, especially on balls hit directly to the fielder, in securing the ball in the glove and preparing to throw. The glove should take the impact of the ball and fold somewhat around the ball. Then the bare hand must act as a lid and trap the ball in the pocket, and prepare for the quick throw.
8. A muffed ball should be pursued without delay. Feeling sorry or angry with oneself for bobbling the ball is not reason to cease trying to field the ball and complete the ball.

Catching – How to Catch – Continued

Because of a lack of coordination the fielder's part, or even because of the lack of a good fielder's glove many balls will hit the glove and fall out. Teach the players how to retrieve the ball with their bare throwing hand and still make the play. Make sure your players don't give up on the ball. The ball is still in play, and because of frequent poor base running you fielder may be given ample time to still make the play.

9. Children must look for a loose ball at their feet with their eyes not their hands. You will find that children have a tendency to look up toward the runner while trying to feel for the ball with their hand or glove without looking for it. Emphasize and demonstrate the need to forget the runner while searching for the ball, and then, once the ball is found, and is secure in their hand or glove, to seek out the runner and make the play if feasible.

Remember: (remind your players)

- **Always use two hands to catch the ball.**
- **Ball above the belt – thumbs together.**
- **Ball below the belt – little fingers together.**

Catching Fly Balls

Catching fly balls is quite an exceptional thing for children of this age group. Usually it requires two improbabilities occurring at the same time. The two improbabilities are **1**, that the ball be hit gently into the air directly toward an infielder, and **2**, that the infielder be one of the few who have the ability to catch fly balls. Nonetheless, there are a couple of things that can be coached to increase the possibility of a child catching a fly ball.

1. Make sure your players keep their glove hand out away from their body, and up high so that they can see the ball and the glove at the same time upon making the catch. When the eye-hand coordination combines with a little experience, it will produce someone who rather frequently catches the ball.
2. Teach your players not to instinctively run up on balls hit into the air. Most players miscalculate the ball thinking it will be shorter than it ends up being. The worse thing that can happen is to have a ball hit over a player's head. If it drops in front of him he can still make a play. If it goes over his head, it's his backup man's ball, if there is one.

Batting

A good place to start with the children is to have them show you how they bat. This will quickly let you know the kids of things you'll need to teach, and it will give you a benchmark to their progress.

Batting – Continued

You may quickly find while they are demonstrating their ability to bat that some of the children do not know how to hold the bat properly. A right-handed batter (one whose right shoulder faces away from the field, must have his left hand wrapped around the bat closest to the nub of the bat). The right hand is then wrapped around the bat above, but not on top of the other hand.

A left-handed batter will hold the bat with his right hand closest to the nub, and left hand above it.

Check Points for Good Hitters

1. **Get set in a good stance.**
2. **Head down, eyes level and on the ball.**
3. **Hands leading the bat into the hitting area.**
4. **Good arm extension through hitting area and follow through.**
5. **Weight back (behind the point of impact) – good balance (over center of stance).**
6. **Lead shoulder in (toward plate) until contact.**
7. **Level bat through hitting area.**
8. **Upper body rotation (lead shoulder beginning at chin; rear shoulder ending at chin).**
9. **Smooth, complete follow-through.**

REMEMBER: DROP THE BAT-THROWING IT MEANS AN AUTOMATIC *OUT*

Check Points for a Good Stance

1. **Front foot opposite the front portion of the plate.**
2. **Feet a little wider than shoulder width apart.**
3. **Knees and waist slightly bent.**
4. **Well balanced, on the balls of both feet.**
5. **Weight slightly emphasized over back foot.**
6. **Lead shoulder under chin and pointing toward the mound.**
7. **Head level, eyes parallel to the ground.**
8. **Front forearm parallel to the ground.**
9. **Hands up, just off the rear shoulder.**
10. **Comfortable alertly relaxed.**

Get the players in a group and explain to them in chronological sequence most of what they have to know about batting. Show them the batters box and how they will position themselves in relationship to the ball on the pitcher.

Show them the foul lines from the view of a batter, and explain all the related rules of a fair and foul ball.

Batting – Continued

Show them the “sweet” spot out toward the end of the bat where it is best to hit the ball, and show them where the surface of the ball should be hit with the bat. Remind them that missing the ball is a strike.

Batting – continued

Show them the general nature of the swing, and then let them show you what they can do. Any more time spent in demonstration and you’ll lose them in fantasyland.

Here are some fundamental hitting ideas:

1. Help the child adjust his body stance so that his feet are comfortably placed under his shoulders. Make sure he has good body balance from his stance through the end of his swing. Knees bent a little for control and balance; body also bent a little at the waist with the upper torso and head leaning a little toward the batter’s box on the other side of the plate. The heels, then, should come up a little and be able to bounce off the ground.
2. Before placing a bat in the hands of your ball players have them all practice stepping toward the pitcher or toward the direction you want them to hit the ball.

As a drill set the players all in one line, arms length apart, facing you. Have them take their batting stances and with your back toward them stride toward an imaginary pitcher.

Have them imitate you a number of times. Look around now and then to see if they are all striding toward the target, or have an assistant coach make sure they are. Stride ... stride ... stride. They won’t even need a bat in their hands, but they should hold their hands up as if they do.

Learning how to stride into a ball which actually transfers energy from the feet, legs and torso through the shoulders, arms and hands to the bat, will especially help the under-developed or weak child deliver more power into his swing.

3. Now put a bat in their hands applying the grip form mentioned earlier in this chapter. It’s okay if the children move their hands up and down the bat in relationship to the knob. When they’re feeling strong and powerful they will want to swing from the end of the bat, and when they don’t feel so great they’ll want to choke up a little. Make sure, however, that they know these options are available to them.

On some occasions, however, you may want to dictate how much they should “choke up” on the bat. In advanced baseball the speed or style of the pitcher may influence a batter on choking. The weight of the bat should almost never be a determining factor. If a batter chokes-up because the bat is too heavy, he should use a lighter bat. The exception is if there is no bat available that is lighter than the one being used. So if the child is struggling because the bat is too heavy, and no lighter one is available, have him choke up a little.

Batting - Continued

4. Make sure their stance is in relationship to the plate, and the pitched ball. You don't want the ball directly in front of them as they face the plate from the batter box.

In advanced baseball the bat should come in contact with the ball out in front of the plate, not over it. Thus to compensate, the batter must move his stance toward the back of the batters box so that the natural point of impact with the ball takes advantage of the full swing which includes the stride, arms swing and the breaking of the wrists.

5. Make sure they push with their back foot as they are striding into the swing.

Many children shift too much of their weight onto their front foot and pick up their back foot as they swing. Ideally, their weight is shifting to the front foot, but the back foot is still carrying substantial weight while pushing the body toward the target. The back foot should not be lifted off the ground during any part of the swing, but pivoted. The sensation for the back foot would be as if the batter is twisting his foot to squash a bug. If the foot does lift, the batter is probably off balance and not striding properly.

6. Now that they have the body movement somewhat in the proper sequence and direction, give them a lightweight bat. The kids all seem to want to pick up bats that are too heavy for them. Discourage this by identifying small, lightweight bats, perhaps 25 or 26 inches in length, and only keep those lightweight bats available for them to use.

You will find their swings much more powerful and accurate when they use a lighter bat. A heavy bat may even force them to change their stance and swing to compensate for the additional weight.

7. Their arms and hands should be up and away from their chests in their stance position. The hand should be to the right of the rear shoulder; elbows slightly up.

This is done to prepare them for the relative position of their hands, arms and bat at the point of impact with the ball. Thinking of their torso as the fulcrum, the greatest speed in the chain that links the batter to the sweet spot is achieved at the end of the bat. As the bat and arms progress away from the body even greater speed is attained; add that to the assistance of gravity in a slightly downward swing of the bat, and one has generated considerable bat speed.

The first movement of the swing is to move the hands a few inches away from the ball toward the backstop as the front foot begins the stride. The swing should also include taking the left hand to the ball. The head should be down in the middle of the "V" of the arms with a level two-eyed look at the ball.

If a batter stance includes arms and hands that are too close and low, the swing arc will be reduced thus reducing bat speed, and if they swing up at the ball, gravity will act against bat speed. Of course there are other reasons why a batter shouldn't uppercut a ball.

Batting - Continued

For those batters who may have an extreme uppercut problem (which is common at this age) here's a drill:

Place a target in the infield dirt about 20 feet in front of the plate, and have the batter try to hit that target with the batted ball. The only way they'll be able to hit it is by swinging down on the ball.

8. Make sure they're swinging the bat, not pushing it.

Conceptually, "swinging" the bat is like throwing the bat at the ball. The arms and hands are extended away from the body; the bat is swung from a position behind the right shoulder; the wrists break fiercely at about the point of impact; and the follow-through pulls the torso all-the-way around.

If the children are "pushing" the bat, little bat speed will be attained. A good drill for those that are pushing the bat is for them to hold the bat high, and back away from their body with the wrists cocked back or bent so that the bat is pointing back over their shoulder behind their right ear. Then have them throw their bat at the ball a few times to get their wrists breaking, and the swinging motion understood.

The swing should start from the bat position held up and to the right of the body and back toward the umpire in the batting stance. Watch out for the child that sets-up properly, then proceeds to move the bat toward the ball and "punches" at the ball. The bat throwing drill can help this child.

Another drill to help a child stop punching at the ball from a close distance is the following:

Have the child take his stance with the bat held up and to the right of his rear shoulder, then stand behind him and hold the end of the bat. While he is looking at the target, have him pull the bat out of your grip toward the target. This makes him understand where the initial force is to be generated in the swing, and it also strengthens the muscles necessary to start the swing back there.

If the batter is one that was punching at the ball with a partial swing, he would have probably swung more accurately using his old method than the full swing method you've just taught him. But in time, and not too much time, he'll be hitting the ball with precision as well as power.

9. Strive eventually for a level swing. To overcome their extremes you may have to coach the opposite extreme, but this has got to be temporary.

The swing you prepare them for must be the swing that is on the same plane as the pitch. This will enhance the child's ability to make contact with the ball. The law of averages, therefore, are not improved by swinging in the same plane as the ball is traveling.

Batting - Continued

Nonetheless, his whole body movement, and his future performance may depend upon him learning to swing level.

Remember: (tell your players)

- **Hold your hands up and out from your shoulder.**
- **Keep your eyes on the ball.**
- **Bend your knees and relax.**
- **Hit down on the ball.**
- **Hit the ball hard.**
- **Drive the ball up the middle.**

Playing Catch

Be specific. Line up half of the team on the same baseline with their parents standing 10 to 20 feet apart. Stress the importance of throwing to each other and not at each other. Partner your stronger players together – they should be able to play catch with more accuracy and a longer period of time. Then you can help the children who need more individual attention. Give everyone a specific task. I.e. ‘Catch ten grounders then back up 5 steps.’ ‘Catch 10 fly balls, then back up 8 steps.’ ‘Let me see who can catch the most balls in a row without either partner missing.’ ‘Can you both catch it 5 times without dropping the ball?’ ‘How about 10 times?’ During this exercise, both coaches should be moving from child to child to correct any severe throwing problems that are apparent. Always giving positive feedback the entire time. ‘Good throw, John, now try it with your other foot in front. You should always try to have the right foot in front when you throw the ball with your left hand’ etc. **Total Time** 5 to 20 minutes.

Alternative:

Partner your strong players with children who need more help saying: ‘Stephen, Sam could use a little help, do you think you can throw the ball to him gently so that he can catch it. I sure would appreciate it. It’s hard for me to help everyone at the same time.’

Base Running

For example: We were coaching the kids concerning the care that has to be taken when running on a fly ball. After we practiced hitting fly balls, and running or not-running as the case may be for about 15 minutes, we brought the kids into a huddle, and re-emphasized “why” they shouldn’t immediately run on most fly balls, and that they must wait to see if the ball would be caught, and listen for the base coach’s instructions. We then asked if the children had any questions, and one player raised his hand and asked, “Coach, what is a fly ball?”

Base Running - Continued

A “fly ball” is nomenclature common to baseball, but may not be words that are easily translatable to someone just entering baseball for the first time. If we had changed the instruction, from “Don’t run on a fly ball.” To “Don’t run when a ball is hit into the air.” We probably would have succeeded in our instruction much more readily.

Of course, it is also very natural for a coach to use common baseball terms such as “fly ball”, “force out”, “foul ball”, etc., and assume the children understand what is being said. But they may not. I encourage using these terms because the children have to learn them, but perhaps initially they should be used in conjunction with a more definitive description.

1. The first place to start in teaching the art of base running is at home plate. Make sure they start running to first as soon after their bat has made contact with the ball as possible. Getting away from the plate immediately is absolutely essential. Don’t allow them to watch the batted ball, or straighten their cap or anything else but to get their balance and start running.
2. Upon approaching first base they should look for the first base coach’s base running signals. The base coach should include different signals with verbal instructions. The signals are in reality visual aids for the children to easily understand what they are instructed to do. The signals should be simple and consistent.
3. The base runners should be taught to run straight to the next base.

The children can run a small hook upon approaching first base to get them heading toward second, but they won’t be able to make sharp turns like they’re supposed to if they are running hard. Nonetheless, they should be instructed to keep as close as possible to a straight line instead of making a big sweep toward the outfield.

4. Teach them that while on the base paths they should try to locate the whereabouts of the ball, but it should not be done in a manner that distracts from their base running speed, direction or attention to the base coach.

Knowing where the ball is gives them additional knowledge with which to make judgments as to how to proceed on the bases.

5. The base runner should be taught to look for the next base coach as soon as possible.

For example, as the runner rounds first base he should try to pick-up the location of the ball while listening to the first base coach behind him. Then halfway toward second the runner should become aware of what the third base coach wants him to do. He should “pick-up” the third base coach out of the corner of his eye while he is running.

All this will seem quite confusing to the young base runner. He has to look for the ball, listen for the first base coach.

Base Running - Continued

6. Instruct the children to touch all bases with a sizable part of their foot.
7. When a base runner is stationary on a bag waiting for the next play, he should always be facing the infield. His right foot should always be the advanced foot. His left foot should always be on the bag. Watch for this, because many of your base runners will setup improperly.

Line-up 6- to 8 players on your team at home plate. One at a time each player takes his or her position, swings at an imaginary ball, drops the bat, and then runs to first base. That person then becomes a runner and advances one base for every batter until he/she reaches home. This drill can be repeated with the base runners advancing 2 bases every time the imaginary ball is hit. While this group is practicing base running, the rest of the team should not be in the field but with the other coach involved in a different activity.

Try putting a familiar object on the bases for the first few practices. You could try a baseball hat for 1st, a rubber snack for 2nd and a Power Ranger for 3rd. Children tend to understand and remember objects better than concepts like 1st, 2nd and 3rd, especially the five-year-olds. You can change to proper terms as the season progresses and as their understanding of the game increases.

Coaching – How To Throw

The importance of coaching the proper physical fundamentals cannot be overemphasized. The form developed in youth may have a long-term impact on a child's ability to compete and enjoy that sport. Even though these children are "new" at this sport, it is easier to learn correctly than to "unlearn" something later on.

A child's hands are so small that you cannot expect them to hold the ball with the normal "two-fingered" grip used by more advanced hardball players. Depending upon the strength and size of their hands, you may have to allow them to use a three-fingered or four-fingered grip.

Once you have shown them the proper way, allow them to use the way that seems most in line with their size, strength and coordination. If it feels comfortable to them, it may be the right way for them to do it.

As they grow they will also grow into the more advanced way of performing the physical fundamentals. Switching to the two-fingered grip, for example, will come natural to them as their hands grow, and they discover they can throw faster, farther and with more control.

Coaching – How To Throw - Continued

Many youngsters will incorrectly throw from their shoulder. They look like they're pushing the ball rather than throwing. We call this "short arming" the ball. It's difficult to get much velocity when using this method and the ball usually does not move in the intended direction. Body movement has a great influence on the quality of a throw and on the endurance of the thrower's arm.

The following are some of the most important fundamentals of throwing overhand:

1. The ball player must hold the ball firmly. He must begin control of the ball where he initially comes in contact with it, in the palm of his hand. A firm grip does not mean stiff and rigid.
2. The thrower's body should be in balance with the knees bent, anticipating a stride directly toward the target.

If he has just fielded the ball, small, quick steps should be used to put him in a position of balance for the throw. (Left, right pick up the ball. Left, right throw.)

3. He should raise his throwing hand up over his shoulder, away from his head.

Some advanced players will reach back more than they reach up, and that's okay, but many will have a tendency to push the ball instead of throw it. Raising the ball above the shoulders and away from the head makes it easier to throw and not push.

A baseball is supposed to be released by the thumb and allowed to roll out of the hand up toward the fingertips, and then from the ends of the fingers slung toward the target. This last second slinging motion will usually cause the hand to come forward, breaking at the wrists in a flipping action.

An excellent drill to promote this "slinging" or "flipping" motion is to ask your players to hold the ball up in the air at the release point, and without moving their arms cock the wrists back, and flip the ball forward off the ends of the fingers, following through with the hand and breaking at the wrist.

Remember: (tell your players)

- **Run as hard as you can.**
 - **Don't watch the ball.**
 - **Don't stop before the base.**
 - **Always run past first base.**
 - **Listen to your base coach.**
4. The thrower should then begin to turn his body away from the target, to the right if he is right-handed, while keeping his eyes on the target, keeping his arm cocked in the throwing position.

Coaching – How To Throw – Continued

5. Then his body must begin its quick twist or pivot toward the target followed by the swinging of the throwing arm toward the target.

The turning or pivoting of the body will not only help the player get speed on the ball, but will also help protect his arm as he matures.

One way to communicate the need for this pivoting requirement is to tell the thrower that he has an imaginary “star” or use inexpensive stickers on the outside of each sleeve just below the shoulder. As the thrower pivots back before the throw he should end up with the star on the left sleeve facing the target, and the star on the right sleeve facing away from the target. When he completes his pivot throw and follows through, the star on his right sleeve should be facing the target, with the star on his left sleeve facing away from the target.

6. If right-handed, his left leg should already be striding toward the target. The length of the stride should be designed to give momentum toward the target without losing balance, or an inordinate amount of time.
7. His whole body then should be moving toward the target, with his feet planted, flowing smoothly into the complete follow-through.
8. The left gloved hand, if a right-handed thrower can be swung out away from the body to aid in maintaining the balance of the throw.
9. The thrower should quickly end up in balance with knees bent facing the target, and ready for the next eventuality.

Look for these points when you’re evaluating the throwing technique of your player.

1. Gets set.
2. Drops the arm down to his side.
3. Brings the arm up over the top into the 90 degree throwing angle. Tilts head to the opposite side.
4. Leads with the opposite shoulder.
5. Reaches, extends arm toward the target.
6. Lands on a flexed knee.
7. Follows-through. (Carried arm across the body.)

Remember: (tell your players)

- **Throw overhand.**
- **Throw hard.**
- **Aim chest high at your target player.**
- **Step toward your target when you throw.**

Coaching – How To Throw – Continued

Throwing: Dead Ball Drill

Any position. Place 3 balls on the ground, then have the player charge it and throw them one at a time to 1st base. Variation: throw to 2B or 3B.

Throwing:

Line the player's 15 feet from a fence. Everyone has a ball. Position the players in the proper throwing stance (mainly – the foot that is opposite the throwing arm should be in front). Have the players try to hit the fence on a fly ball. Everyone throws at your command, and then everyone retrieves his or her ball at your command. Variation: have the children aim at a target – i.e. pretend they're throwing to 1st base, so have everyone throw their ball at the same spot on the fence. Do this several times.

Safety Rules

Review the safety rules of Coach-Pitch with them frequently especially when you see them doing things that may be dangerous.

Some of these rules are:

- a. *Always look where you are throwing the ball.*
- b. *Never stand near someone who is swinging a bat.*
- c. *Only swing a bat in designated areas, at designated times.*
- d. *Look around before you swing a bat to make sure nobody will get hit.*
- e. *Do not throw your gloves into the air.*
- f. *Do not throw rocks or other things.*
- g. *Do not slide.*

Team Uniforms

Hats and shirts are provided. Names and/or numbers may be printed on backs or on sleeves. Be sure and ask parents before doing this – many prefer not to have their child's name on their shirts. These little players get really excited about they're uniforms and they really look pretty cute.

Coach-Pitch Skill Suggestions

Skill 1: Stretching and Warmup

- A. Circle-up drill – Participants will form a large circle facing instructors positioned inside the circle. One coach will lead sets of jumping jacks, toe touches, hamstring stretches or other exercises while the second coach inspects performance of participants. The coach may add other exercises to promote variety.

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- B. Short-run drill – Participants should engage in a short run to and from a designated target. Coaches should accompany participants emphasizing long strides, controlled form and proper breathing.

Skill 2: Throwing

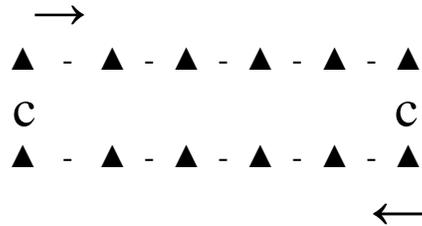
- A. Grip, stride, and overhand form drill – Participants should be assembled into a straight line facing coaches. Each participant should have a ball. Each individual should be shown how to grip the ball, stride toward the target and throw in overhand motion utilizing full arm motion. All participants should practice this throwing motion without releasing the ball.

Once everyone is individually instructed, start at one end of the line and make each participant perform the simulated motion correctly.

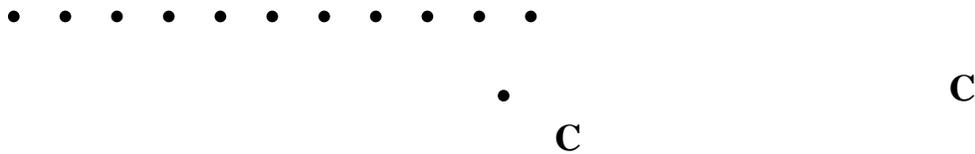
- B. Wrist flip drill – Have participants pair up and position themselves in two lines facing each other (use cones). Gloves are not needed. Each pair should have one ball. Participants should hold their own throwing arm at the forearm region and flip the ball to their partner. The partner in turn does the same and a game of catch is assumed. This drill stresses proper wrist action in the throwing technique. Coaches should closely inspect participants' performance.

Coach-Pitch Skill Suggestions – Continued

- C. Game of catch drill – Utilize cones to ensure straight lines and have participants form pairs. Coaches should be constantly critiquing participants emphasizing proper grip, stride, arm motion, follow through and throwing to a target. This drill is highly essential since both throwing and catching skills are utilized. Coaches should be very active in this drill as opposed to merely observing it.



- D. Throwing distance drill – Participants should be assembled in a single file line. One coach remains with the group while the other coach assumes a position in the throwing area. One at a time the participants throw the ball for distance. This is a fun type of drill that is excellent for the end of the day excitement and is not designated for longer than five or ten minutes.



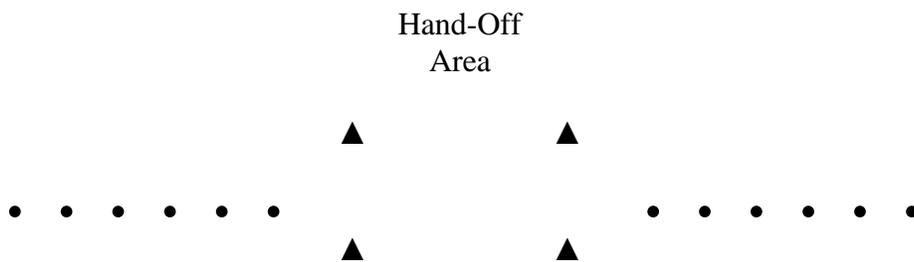
Skill 3: Catching – Always stress catching with two hands

- A. Glove orientation drill – Participants are assembled in a straight line facing the coaches. All participants are individually inspected for properly wearing their glove. Coaches show the three basic glove positions used in catching: catching from the waist down, catching from the waist to head, and catching over the head. Glove positions in the forehand and backhand techniques are emphasized. Once individuals have mastered these positions, the instructor should visually indicate the position of a simulated “catch” and have the participants respond in unison. For fun, introduce a “Simon Says” theme to promote enthusiasm.

Coach-Pitch Skill Suggestions – Continued

B. Ready positions drill – Participants are assembled in a straight line facing coaches. With gloves on, participants are instructed to assume the ready positions: knees, back and buttocks bent, glove and free hand down low, head up and weight distributed on the balls of the feet. Once the position is mastered, participants are taught to move in that position using appropriate footwork. The coach then visually points to a chose direction and has the group move in unison towards that direction.

C. Hand-off drill – Participants are arranged in two single file lines facing each other. All participants must wear their gloves. One ball is utilized. The first individual in each line starts toward each other. A ball is handed from one individual to another between the two cones designated as the hands-off area. The entire group moves through this process, returning to the opposite line and forming a continual movement. This will forced participants to utilize hand-eye coordination and the children will really enjoy the speed and continuous activity.



Coach-Pitch Skill Suggestions – Continued

- D. Ground ball relay drill – Can be adapted for one or two instructors, although this drill is very effective for the whole group together. Participants are arranged in a straight line facing the coaches. One coach assumes a position at the beginning of the line while the other stands in the middle of the line. The distance between the coaches and the participants can vary according to skill level, but as the skill progresses, coaches should rotate farther and farther away from the group. The coaches each roll a ground ball to a participant in line. They throw the ball back to the coach and the process is repeated with next participant at the beginning of the line in a constant rotation. A well run drill will be very quick and exciting. Coaches should be constantly reminding participants of the ready position and the proper form.



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- E. Fly ball drill – Very simple drill to familiarize the participants with catching over their head and making a running catch. Usually performed in small groups (3-4), the coach arranges the participants in a single file line. The front participant moves sideways 5-7 feet into a clear area. The coach should always perform a quick review of the glove orientation drill to insure proper form. Each participant is tossed (or hit) a ball a designated number of times (not to exceed 5) by the instructor. That participant then returns to the end of the line and is replaced by a new participant. More advanced participants should perform running catches and over the shoulder catches. Distance between the coach and participants varies according to skill level.
- F. Infield drill – Participants are assembled in the nine baseball positions (may add a tenth position). The coach stands at home plate with a bat and ball. One at a time, participants are hit ground balls/fly balls and instructed which base or player to throw the ball to. ALL ASPECTS of catching and throwing should be constantly monitored and corrected by the coach. It is highly important to stress playing one's position and learning where to throw the ball. This is undoubtedly the most important fielding drill.

Skill 4: **Hitting**

- A. Bat orientation drill – Usually performed in small groups (3-4). Participants stand in a straight line facing the coach. Bats are inspected for proper size. Observe for a bat too heavy. Each individual is instructed in proper bat grip, stand, stride, swing and follow through. The MOST IMPORTANT thing to stress is head down and eye on the ball. Participants must be taught to keep their eye on the ball at all times. The coach may wish to have participants perform swings and individually evaluate.

Coach-Pitch Skill Suggestions – Continued

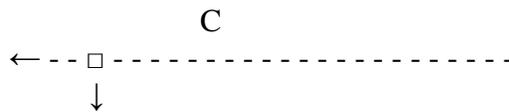
- B. Hit and run drill – One participant is a batter at home plate. Other participants are assembled in fielding positions. A designated number of balls are hit, with the last hit requiring the batter to run the bases. Coaches should again constantly evaluate hitting techniques as well as fielding techniques used by the shaggers.
- C. Circle-up and hit drill – One participant is the batter while other group members form a semi-circle at a determined distance from the pitcher/hitter. A certain number of hits are allowed, with a semi-circle performing retrieval service. The semi-circle should rotate when it is time for a new hitter. Coaches should provide continuous reminders and praise to all participants.

Skill 5: Base Running

- A. Leaving the batters box drill – Participants are positioned at home plate and are shown how to perform a swing and properly leave the batters box and begin towards first base. Each participant then performs a swing and practices the skill. Coaches should insist on a realistic swing by all participants to avoid premature departure. Make sure the rest of the participants are far enough away in case of a thrown bat. This drill should move very quickly and create a lot of fun. Constantly emphasize hustle. Thrown bats mean an instant out.

Coach-Pitch Skill Suggestions – Continued

- B. Run through and round the base drill – Participants are taught how to alter their running style in beating out ground balls and rounding the base on singles. Participants are lined up single file at home plate. The coach shows them how to run out a ground ball, touching the front portion of the base and running past the base in a straight line as opposed to stopping at the base. Next, the participants are shown how to round the base, “fanning out” 2/3 of the way to the base and continuing on towards second base, either stopping and returning to first or proceeding to second. The drill should move quickly. Coaches must insist on correct technique as this is a crucial skill to learn.



- C. Advance drill – Participants form a single file line at home plate. The first person in line is told what he should run out. The next participant is given an assignment and the first person move accordingly. Example: Tommy is first, he is told to run out a single (emphasize round the base). Bobby is second, he is told to run out a single and Tommy is told to move from first to third. Mary is third, she is told to run out a double and Tommy and Bobby must score. Each participant returns to the end of the line and repeats. Coaches should vary the assignments and constantly evaluate and instruct the participants on proper form. An excellent drill for learning a game situation skill. Coaches should always emphasize alert, “heads up” base running.

Skill 6: Scrimmage Games

Scrimmage games are very low-key and non-competitive. One inning will consist of each participant on each team batting once. Outs are made either “first base out” or “pitchers hand”, depending on skill level. Participants should be put in proper defensive positions, with positions being rotated every inning to allow each child to play a different position. Scrimmage games are meant to be fun. Never criticize a participant and do not allow any participants to criticize each other. Constantly refer back to all skills and fundamentals which have been addressed. Make sure the environment is one of fun, participation, and learning. Coaches must be actively involved in the scrimmage contest – no standing around!

Skill 7: Parent – Child Game

The last practice can be used for a game of parents versus children. The same format in the scrimmage games should be used. Parents and their children should play on the same teams and teams will be divided by the coach. Treats can be made available after the game. This event will make a good climax to a highly successful season.

Remember: *If you are having fun your enthusiasm will show in your players.*

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OH MY GOSH, I'M UP!

My gosh, he throws the ball so hard, and very wild too!
It could go right through my head and turn it all to goo!
My knees are shaking, I may faint, I wish I wasn't born.
I think my mother closed her eyes, I feel my father's scorn.

My gut is churning in and out, maybe I have the flu.
Good grief, what am I doing here, I don't know what to do.
Gosh! He just missed Mickey with a fastball high and tight!
Pretty soon he'll have my head right there within his sight.

Oh my gosh, I'm up, he just hit Mickey with the ball!
My glance back to my coach asks if he thinks I am too small.
The Pitcher's looking at me Oh No! I see him grin!
He doesn't even care that he hit Mickey on the chin!

He winds up and delivers, he aimed right at my head!
"Strike one!" exclaims the ump, I stand back up, my face is red.
Oh just please let me live today, I promise to be good.
I'll mind my ma, and do my chores, and eat all of my food.

Again it comes right at me! I duck down to my knee.
"Strike two!" He must be blind this ump I'm sure he cannot see.
Here it comes again and I just swat at it in fear.
I heard a thud and somehow got my first hit of the year.

Now here I am at first base, my mother's eyes open.
Gee I feel great. The game is late, I won't get up again.

Jack McCarthy, 1988